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## MANAGING THE ACCREDITATION GOAL FOR A MULTI-CAMPUS BUSINESS SCHOOL

Matt Elbeck and Richard Williams

*This qualitative study examines the complex issue of a multi-campus business school charged with the goal of accreditation. A review of the literature is followed with survey insights from 22 business school Deans with multi-campus experience, analyzed using constant comparative analysis to seek solution for three central issues (1) to increase the proportion of full-time faculty; (2) encourage scholarship; and (3) foster multi-campus relations. The key findings suggest the central roles of leadership to motivate all constituents, funding, articulation of expectations, and degree of branch autonomy.*

One of the most profound components of business school stature is to achieve accreditation from a premier agency such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) or the European Federation for Management Development (EFMD). Absent from the literature and substantively complicating the accreditation goal is the multi-campus business school. It is the multi-campus business school accreditation case which is the focus and contribution of this exploratory study.

### Theoretical Considerations

*Strategic Perspective:* The motivation to achieve accreditation represents a desired shift from non-accreditation (Caves & Porter, 1977) to one accredited by a recognized agency. Joining the desirable strategic group of accredited business schools is often times delayed due to a lack of isolated mechanisms (Rumelt, 1981) such as sunk costs in non-cooperating faculty, high switching costs to become accredited (e.g., more full-time faculty, support scholarship), and the business school's current reputation and image.

*Evolution versus Revolution:* Managing the goal of single- or multi-campus business school accreditation necessitates consideration of change management. Change management is "the process by which an organization gets to its future state" (Lorenzi & Riley, 2000). In this case, the future state of accreditation (or reaccreditation) is the desired outcome. The change process (tactics) might involve a Darwinian evolutionary model exhibited as a gradual and staged approach reflecting a good fit between the business school and its environment, with those affected by change leading and participating in the change process (Eldredge & Gould, 1972; Kilmann & Covin, 1988; Leonard-Barton, 1988). Alternatively, fundamental organizational change might occur rapidly (Gibson & Jackson, 1987; Tushman, Newman & Romanelli, 1986; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). Eldredge and Gould (1972) proposed the theory of "punctuated equilibrium" which describes an abrupt intervention (the goal of accreditation) leading to rapid change. Such radical change necessitates a deep structural or paradigm change (Gersick, 1991) forcing change in basic assumptions, business practices, culture and organizational structure – all demanding a new vision and

new managers or executives. To achieve radical change, incumbents are not assumed capable of change; rather, they must be qualified for change, while evolutionary change argues for adapting change to people (Stoddard & Jarvenpaa, 1995). To help bridge the polar evolutionary and revolutionary approaches, Greiner (1972) posits a model where growth results in alternating evolutionary and revolutionary change wherein the business school rides a pendulum from decentralization to centralization and back to decentralization with turnarounds when the organization has gone too far.

### Multi-Campus and Faculty-Level Considerations

Beyond strategic and tactical direction, there remain operational issues concerning faculty themselves. The Burke-Litwin (1992) model is a useful starting point, predicting individual and organizational performance by examining transformational (leadership, culture, mission and strategy) and transactional factors (management practices, structure, policies and procedures, task requirements and individual skills/abilities). This classification is helpful to underscore the initial requirement of competent leadership with the remaining issues to be addressed when planning to achieve accreditation. This leadership is now tasked with the multi-campus business school which may be considered a portfolio of Strategic Business Units (SBUs). Work by Golden (1992) cautions that "SBU performance is enhanced when the SBU controls those functions and activities on which its strategy depends..... and, (ed.) when functions and activities which are not central to the SBU's strategy are either decentralized to given relatively little attention by SBU management." Hence, the accreditation goal must draw all the campuses into play into the appropriate mix of centralization/decentralization that achieves the college's strategic objectives.

### Revolution, Transformation and Transaction

For the rapid change scenario, the prescription of removing all incapable incumbents is sobering, if not an impossible situation, in the short run. The necessary investment in time and energy by the various actors must be addressed. From a transformational perspective, the immediate importance of leadership far outweighs additional

matters such as culture, mission and strategy. However, transactional factors such as structure, policies and procedures and faculty skills/abilities would seem the long-term challenge once leadership is in place. It is crucial to involve all the campuses in a transparent manner (avoiding post-contractual agency theory problems) to ensure commitment and trust throughout.

### Multi-Campus in the Public Sector

In 1997, The National Association of System Heads (Gaither, 1999) noted that 50 public higher education systems in 38 states accounted for over 75% of all students found in public college and universities. Kerr and Gade (1989) highlight a clear trend in public higher education toward consolidation and central control, resulting in friction over control between campuses and the system, and between internal and external constituencies. There are issues over freedom and control, liberty and license, and rights and responsibilities of the involved parties. The resultant tension over conflicting values and ideologies underscore the constant balancing act required to manage a multi-campus organization.

For a business school to pursue accreditation, it is worth noting that without a university-wide strategy in place, all that results is an exercise in futility. In spite of work on multi-campus management such as Richardson (1997) and Pickens (1999), on the California Higher Education System; and Hobby and Tiede (1999) on the University of Houston System, suggestions or a rubric for multi-campus school of business accreditation management are absent from the scholarly literature. According to email correspondence with the Executive Vice President & Chief Accreditation Office, AACSB International, "if there are multiple locations, quality must be demonstrated at all locations. There are no specific standards for multi-location business schools" (Trapnell, 2008), hence the motivation to engage in this study. The closest analogy from the business world would come from multi-national corporations and their need to operate coherently among multiple national cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Individual campuses have unique "cultures" that function in much the same way that national cultures have long done especially if they have been delegated significant responsibility and authority over their own activities.

## METHOD

### Statement of the Problem

How does a presently non-accredited multi-campus business school achieve the goal of accreditation? Based on an in-depth interview with a multi-campus business school Dean, the parameters limiting the scope of the problem are expressed in terms of three research questions:

1. Increase the proportion of full-time faculty,
2. Encourage research where lacking, and,

3. Ensure compliance and cooperation between the various campuses.

The transition from reliance on adjunct faculty to full-time faculty for course staffing encourages a sense of commitment between student and faculty. This also concerns increasing the proportion of academically qualified faculty (those faculty with terminal academic degrees in the field in which they are teaching) versus professionally qualified faculty (those faculty whose professional experience substitutes for some or all of the academic preparation). From the AACSB's perspective, a participating faculty member actively engages in all the activities of the school in matters beyond direct teaching responsibilities (AACSB, 2007, p. 37). Such participating faculty must contribute at least 75% of the school's annual teaching load (AACSB, 2007, p.38).

The second issue concerns balancing faculty contributions as classroom teachers and as scholars who are current in their academic field (AACSB, 2007, p. 43, 47). This relates to the twin functions of a university: creating new knowledge and then disseminating that knowledge. This primary factor includes a subset of supportive services including library and technology and seed funding for research.

Finally, achieving high quality faculty cooperation and compliance between and among multiple business school campuses and/or branches should result in increased support and commitment to the various initiatives to achieve accreditation even at the more remote locations. Typically, the flagship campus draws the lion's share of resources which may serve to create an "us vs. them" mentality not conducive to a genuine sense of inclusion and camaraderie across the campuses. A typical result would be for each campus to become a mini-fiefdom primarily concerned with their parochial interests. The overall problem facing this study is best expressed as:

"What solutions exist for the key accreditation issues facing a multi-campus business school?"

### Research Design

Given the absence of published works on multi-campus business school accreditation, exploratory qualitative research was selected, with emphasis placed on the quality of respondents and their responses. The resulting experience survey (also known as a key informant survey) taps the knowledge and experience of those familiar with the administration of a multi-campus business school. Respondents are Deans of accredited business schools who were previously or currently are in a multi-campus setting.

To identify plausible solutions for the accreditation related questions, the survey responses were analyzed using constant comparative analysis based in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) such that the theory is grounded in the data, useful where little research exists allowing for

constant comparative analysis of the data; a systematic examination for similarities or differences among the data. This constant data comparison helps immerse the researcher into the participant's mind set (Patton, 1990), whilst the repeated systematic examination of the data improves the quality of data analysis (Hammersley, 1981). The data analysis was inductive, searching for understanding of the Deans' perceptions, not to prove existing theory. It is possible to use literature-based codes to generate results, though this may constrain the emergence of new ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### Interview Process

The solution to the stated problem seemed best answered by accessing primary data via a questionnaire administered by e-mail. The questionnaire was composed of three open-ended questions, each dealing with one of the research questions:

1. Increase the proportion of full time faculty,
2. Encourage scholarship and balance scholarship with instruction, and
3. Foster compliant and cooperative multi-campus relations.

To assure response quality, the questionnaire was prefaced with the Qualifier "Do you have multi-campus experience?" If 'NO', thank you for your time. If 'YES,' proceed. A copy of this questionnaire is located in Appendix A.

### Sample

The population of interest is defined as Deans of accredited business schools in the US with experience managing a business school spread over more than one campus or branch. The sampling frame was drawn from the entire list of 407 accredited Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, International (AACSB International) business schools in the United States. The sample selection is of a non-probability purposive form.

Alternative sample frames could have been sourced from the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), primarily positioned for the two-year

community college level, or numerous business schools opting for nominal accreditation (such as the minimally required accreditation by a state or regional university-wide accrediting body). Ostensibly, selecting respondents from among AACSB International accredited schools represents the 'better' US business schools, and as such, these incumbent Deans would better appreciate the implications of a high quality accreditation process. From the online list of all the accredited business schools, each school's Dean was contacted by e-mail with a three-question survey, prefaced with a qualifier question noted in the previous section.

The questionnaire shown in Appendix A was e-mailed to 386 Deans of AACSB International accredited business schools in the United States (those where an appropriate e-mail could be obtained) during the period of November 2007 to September 2008. Seventy-nine Deans responded (20.5 % response rate), with 22 (6.1% response rate) self-qualified as having experience in a multi-campus setting and having completed the entire questionnaire.

## RESULTS

### Data Coding and Category Development

Qualitative data (statements and/or paragraphs) from each respondent, whose identity was removed to assure confidentiality (Erlandson et al, 1993), were transcribed as statements relating to each one of the three research questions. The identity of each respondent was randomly coded to assure respondent confidentiality. Table 1 shows a small sample of the total number of respondent statements. Consistent with constant comparative analysis, each statement was read and assigned a code associated with the statement to form categories (themes) of similarity referred to as concept identification and categorization (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process was repeated for each ensuing respondent thus comparing analysis of one set of data to another, to (a) determine whether categories remain constant as new data is introduced, and (b) that data is not forced into categories, but that the categories represent the data, as suggested by Elliott and Lazenbatt (2005, p.50). The results are shown as Table 2.

**Table 1: Sample of Respondent Statements for each Research Question**

<b>Research Question:</b> Transition away from a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty.	<b>Research Question:</b> Balance faculty scholarship with instruction.	<b>Research Question:</b> Cooperation and compliance between the various campuses.
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Statements</b>
This is difficult to answer without additional detail. If I have the full support of the top administration, including approved positions and funding, I would likely use a multi-year hiring process and seek a mix of new and experienced faculty members.	I would hold the same standard if they are in shared accreditation. We have done that and continue to do that at our school. It is tough and results in tough P & T calls but it has to be done to maintain AACSB ratios for the college as a whole.	In my judgment, maximizing opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and joint decision making are key.
In my judgment, you must hire as many full time faculty as possible and as quickly as possible. In the meantime, you must let the adjunct faculty know that the move to more permanent faculty is in the best interest of the institution and students.	This is why it is important to hire a mix of faculty members based on experience. One wants the experienced people to mentor the less experienced people. One must also be very explicit about the expectations – how many courses, how many publications, what type of publications, etc.	Rotation of faculty will further the goal of cooperation and team work
I would bring the full-time faculty under one umbrella and rotate faculty among main/branch campuses.	In my judgment, fair, transparent, and mutually created rewards for balanced focus on research and teaching are required.	Also be careful of remuneration creep. Faculty can develop the Hand-out mentality, where they want to get paid to walk across the street. Expectations need to be clear.
First of all, I would make sure that your loyal adjuncts know what is happening and why. Obtain their help and support. You do not want them to feel left out or replaced (run off).	To achieve excellence, there is little room for good teachers who are not accomplished scholars or accomplished scholars who are not good teachers. Balance is achieved by each faculty member working to improve in the area that they are less naturally adept.	Include some tenure-track faculty in the mix who live in the “branch campus” area.

Table 2: Categories and Codes for each Research Question

<b>Research Question:</b> Transition away from a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty.	<b>Research Question:</b> Balance faculty scholarship with instruction.	<b>Research Question:</b> Cooperation and compliance between the various campuses.
<b>Category 1: Manage Adjuncts</b> Codes: 1. Reduce Adjuncts 2. Keep Best Adjuncts	<b>Category 5: Go for it!</b> Codes: 1. Demand Both 2. All Full-Time Faculty engage in research	<b>Category 8: Central Control</b> Codes: 1. Standardized Policies, Procedures and Structures 2. Eliminate Pecking Order 3. Rewards.
<b>Category 2: Focus on Full-Time Faculty</b> Codes: 3. Recruit Full-Time Faculty 4. Full-Time Faculty Input	<b>Category 6: Support Faculty Strengths</b> Codes: 3. Accept Diversity 4. Customize Expectations 5. Articulate Expectations of Faculty	<b>Category 9: Decentralized Control</b> Codes: 4. Rotate Faculty Across Branches 5. Multi-Campus Departments 6. Branch Missions.
<b>Category 3: Organizational Change</b> Codes: 5. Mission Driven 6. Slowly build new culture	<b>Category 7: Gradual Shift</b> Codes: 7. Faculty as mentors 8. Develop Mission 9. Use rewards	<b>Category 10: Stakeholder Input</b> Codes: 7. Faculty Input 8. Student Input
<b>Category 4: Funding</b> Codes: 10. Secure Funding		

Quality of the Analysis

To assure quality or belief in the results, strategies are applied to assure trustworthiness and dependability of the analysis. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) suggest four areas of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. These constructs are similar to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Achieving truth value was implemented by the continual sharing of concepts and categories between the two researchers who met regularly to discuss interpretations and relationships between the codes and categories (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Given this analysis is inductive in nature, applicability, which is the fit between data and theory is not considered (Glaser, 1978). Consistency by continually comparing the data was accomplished by allocating one hour a day per researchers for one week for this purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Neutrality of the analysis was achieved by inviting an independent third person (Erlandson et al, 1993) to independently code all the respondent statements using the codes shown in Table 2. Intercooder reliability was computed as 87%.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Transition from heavy reliance on adjunct faculty to full-time faculty for course staffing.

As noted in Table 2, to resolve this problem, there are four categories to be addressed:

*Adjuncts:* The options are to reduce them or keep the best adjuncts (especially those with doctoral potential). In essence, one could manage both.

*Full-time faculty:* The options are to recruit more full-time faculty, and to encourage input from full-time faculty. These options are also supportive of one another and could be implemented simultaneously.

*Organizational change:* the options are to adhere to a mission and slowly build a new culture which emphasizes full-time faculty. This was reflected in various ways, from cross-campus departments, to rotating full-time faculty across campuses.

*Funding:* Naturally, increasing full-time faculty requires a significant source of funding elements most popular actions are to recruit new faculty,

seek funding (internally and externally) and reorganize. Finally, addressing the existing pool of adjuncts, plans to release them together with assurances of some notice were mentioned.

The shift away from a reliance on adjunct faculty will likely include all the developed categories, perhaps starting with input from full-time faculty, securing significant funding and starting work on a new business school culture. As the number of part-time, non-tenured, and adjunct faculty used to teach classes are reduced across all campuses, the most promising adjuncts are retained for their development into full-time faculty status and a refined mission will all serve to attract appropriate full-time faculty. Full-time faculty would be offered the opportunity to make better use of their training and skills at a different location. The resultant hiring and relocation will require the commitment of significant additional resources. The shift toward full-time faculty will incur higher costs in the short run but eventually will add to the reputation of the college.

#### **Research Question 2: Balance between faculty as classroom teachers and as scholars who are current in their academic field.**

As noted in Table 2, to resolve this problem, there are three categories to be addressed:

*Go for it:* This is the no holds barred approach which demands excellence in scholarship and instruction together with the edict that all full-time faculty engage in research.

*Support faculty strengths:* In this case, one accepts diversity and manages this by customizing faculty expectations and clearly articulates those expectations.

*Gradual shift:* This approach uses faculty as mentors to those embarking on scholarship, whilst reorienting the school's mission together with the judicious use of rewards.

The requirement for scholarship to accompany good teaching will eventually become the norm throughout the school at all its locations. Whether the transformation is instant or gradual, one assumes all faculty are considered equally valuable, and so the criteria for tenure and promotion must be consistently applied. Initially grouping faculty as "teachers" and "scholars" should not be done en masse but done with some flexibility particularly among currently tenured faculty. The application of scholarship standards can be accomplished through the establishment of clear and explicit scholarship criteria for tenure, promotion and other rewards. These standards need to be discussed and widely disseminated to all members of the faculty. In addition, the voluntary reassignment of some "lead" faculty

who have an established and current research agenda can also encourage the spread of scholarly activity in all campus locations.

#### **Research Question 3: Achieve high quality faculty cooperation and compliance between and among multiple business school campuses and/or branches.**

As noted in Table 2, to resolve this problem, there are three categories to be addressed:

*Central control:* advocates integration based on a complete standardization of policies, procedures and structures, elimination of multi-campus pecking orders and the judicious use of rewards to accomplish harmony.

*Decentralized control:* encourages branch uniqueness and builds upon them by rotating faculty across branches, developing departments in each branch and developing branch missions.

*Stakeholder input:* reaches out to both faculty and students to resolve any multi-campus friction.

The integration and cooperation among the multi-campus Business School faculty is advanced by the judicious use of appropriate incentives. The focus of all this interaction will be on coordination to increase research productivity and the delivery of a wider array of quality programs to the students. Cooperative programs and meetings must be utilized to create meaningful interactive opportunities not just "pro forma" get together. Organizing across campuses will provide a structural milieu for cooperation.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Assuming that the AACSB International continue their 'one size fits all' multi-campus accreditation process, then managing consistency across all branches (this presumably includes any stand-alone virtual branch offering online courses) is a must, the solution, consistent with the literature, is either evolutionary (Eldredge & Gould, 1972), revolutionary (Gibson & Jackson, 1987), or a combination of both (Greiner, 1972). It is up to the Dean (and faculty) to decide on the speed and timing of necessary changes to achieve accreditation.

Regardless of the speed of change, achieving multi-campus business school accreditation starts with a mission which in turn forces articulation of goals and plans which must be given some reasonable time for implementation and assessment. Accreditation requires planning and investment. The business school's fundraising should focus on highlighting, among potential donors, the urgent need for funds to coordinate the multi-campus units. Funds could be earmarked for technology, faculty hiring, etc. with the organizing theme being that the gifts will serve to unify and



strengthen the School. Concurrently, the Dean should develop a program to marginalize underperforming faculty. The whole will be greater than the sum of the individual parts only if these links are forged between desired behavior and rewards.

At the faculty level, the personal risk of accreditation facing incumbent faculty may be considered in terms of work by Clarke, Ellett, Bateman and Rugutt (1996) on 53 Research I Universities who conclude that if an individual's self-interest is being threatened, a proposed change is likely to prompt resistance, and based on the perception of likely effect, some changes are more tolerable than others. Administrators must make an effort to understand the self-interests of faculty in order to formulate appropriate communication to minimize the potential for faculty revolt. Faculty perceptions of reward or punishment may be considered from an Agency Theory perspective. Post-contractual problems between the principal (business school) and the agent (faculty) aim to "evaluate and reward the agent's performance so he or she will be motivated to behave in a manner consistent with the principal's goals" (Bergen, Dutta & Walker, 1992). The desired set of faculty behaviors must be rewarded for those behaviors to have a chance of being exercised. Furthermore, given the context of relationship development between principal and agent, work by Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggest that trust and commitment are important for achieving cooperation, with trust having the stronger effect.

Parallel to the question of accreditation urgency is the question "might accreditation be achieved on the cheap?" Greiner (1972) and others would assert due to the evolutionary nature of organizational development, that this is not possible. Nonetheless, the advice offered by experienced business school Deans implies the goal may be realizable only if the School has adequate funds in place together with a willing and able Dean, academically qualified faculty and multi-campus administrators. Sadly, this is not often the case and to wait for incumbent administrators and faculty full of suspicion and inertia to retire is not a practical option. Even waiting does not guarantee that the lax culture will not continue and be passed on to the next generation. The University's senior administration must be involved together with a structure and reward system to jump start the process for a successful outcome. Nonetheless, business schools do have a choice in lieu of AACSB accreditation by selecting the more modest goal of ACBSP accreditation, geared for 2-year schools. Such an approach would be consistent with an evolutionary approach and better geared toward organizational culture change if this seems a rather significant hurdle. This could then be followed by pursuing AACSB accreditation.

As is perhaps apparent, achieving accreditation in a multi-campus business school is not an enviable task. Advice regarding the three original issues center on a well understood and resolute position, together with the usual

requirements of equity, transparency, collegiality and funding.

Allied to the culture and operations of a business school is the impending reality that by the year 2010 the leading edge baby boomers will be 65 years of age and considering retirement. Given a sizeable majority of business school faculty are baby boomers, the opportunity to hire appropriate faculty by this time will be an opportunity for change. But, will it by then be too late?

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## APPENDIX A

### Copy of the Study's Questionnaire

Good morning Dean ..... My colleague \_\_\_\_\_ and I need your input to help develop a pilot project on aspects of multi-campus and multi-branch management. Would you please help us by completing the following three questions that should take no more than 15 minutes?

#### Qualifier

Have you been a business school administrator in a multi-campus/branch institution? If NO, thank you for your time. If YES, please continue.

#### Scenario

University X has 4 satellite campuses all with resident business faculty. The campuses were historically semi autonomous with independent accreditation, and are now merged into one standardized entity with common accreditation and program offerings. In your opinion, how would you operationally:

1. Manage the transition from heavy reliance on adjunct faculty to full-time faculty for course staffing? (Please enter your answer in the space below).
2. Manage the balance between faculty as class-room teachers and as scholars who are current in their academic field? (Please enter your answer in the space below).
3. Manage high quality faculty cooperation and compliance between and among multiple business school campuses and/or branches? (Please enter your answer in the space below).

Thank you for your help!

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